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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 102: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/56, A/52/57-E/1997/4, A/52/60-E/1997/6, A/52/80-E/1997/14, A/52/183, A/52/328, A/52/351; A/C.3/52/L.2, A/C.3/52/L.3; E/1997/103, E/1997/104)

1. **Mgr. Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that, at the dawn of the new millennium, life had become a struggle for the many victims of violence and warfare, the most extreme forms of which were ethnic cleansing and genocide. Others were the victims of disease which not only took a devastating toll in terms of human life but placed a terrible burden on victims' families. Still others struggled with disabilities and, often marginalized, were unable to reach their full potential. The Holy See added its voice to the call for continued efforts to help those individuals to realize their sacred dignity and their right to life.

2. The elderly, who in the past had been looked upon as wise, were often cast off and forced to live in fear in societies where euthanasia had become an alternative to care. The Holy See committed itself to promoting a deeper understanding of the elderly and their contribution to society.

3. Many young people were separated from their families and became homeless, victims of drugs and marginalized. Girls in particular did not have equal opportunities for education and employment. The world community must renew its efforts to combat illiteracy and to empower young people to fulfil their role, for the solutions to current challenges and problems would be found in the ideas and energies of the next generation. The youth forum to be held in 1998 in Lisbon would be an important step in that direction.

4. People living in poverty, young people, older and disabled persons were erroneously considered to be useless members of society. Many of the hindrances to social development, such as poverty, homelessness, warfare, forced migration and exile, separation, disease and the breakdown of the moral order, had had a devastating effect on the basic unit of society, the family. The Holy See, faithful to its mission, would continue its efforts to strengthen and safeguard the family, emphasizing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children. It called on Governments and societies to recognize the special and essential role of the family.

5. **Mr. Kallehauge** (Denmark) said that follow-up on the three core issues agreed on at the World Summit for Social Development (poverty, employment and social integration) was a priority for the Danish Government at the national as well as the international level. Denmark called on the Committee and the General Assembly to fulfil the mandate entrusted to them. That also meant monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Plan of Action for Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond was the most important instrument for mainstreaming disabled persons. Denmark also supported the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

6. Four years after the General Assembly had adopted the Standard Rules, the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council and other relevant United Nations bodies had yet to be implemented in a coherent way. His delegation called on UNDP and United Nations organizations and agencies, as well as regional and global organizations of persons with disabilities, to continue monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur.

7. The problems of disabled persons should be seen from a human rights perspective. His delegation therefore welcomed the reaffirmation by the Commission on Human Rights of its resolution 1996/27 on the human rights of persons with disabilities and its decision to resume consideration of that item at its fifty-fourth session. A resolution should be adopted in 1998 on the basic human rights of persons with disabilities, including independent living, active participation in all aspects of society, access to shelter, infrastructure and public transport, education and equal opportunity in the labour market.

8. A brief report on the major new initiatives taken in Denmark in the area of disability was attached to the statement circulated to members of the Committee.

9. **Ms. Mikkelsen** (Denmark) welcomed the increasing willingness to listen to young people, who constituted over half the world's population, as demonstrated by the measures taken by some countries to develop a youth policy and to enhance youth involvement in the decision-making process.

10. At the international level, her delegation welcomed the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

11. In his final report of 1992, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Youth had suggested the establishment of a "Youth Rights Charter", a proposal which had been endorsed by the World Youth Forum in 1996. The aim would

be to establish a compendium of the existing rights of youth rather than to agree on any new rights. Such a charter would enable youth organizations and Governments to share knowledge, increase awareness among youth of their rights, and mainstream the concerns and particular needs of youth into overall policy at both the national and international levels. The right to development and the right to participate in decision-making bodies were an integral part of social development, along with the right to a basic education and to further training, which was vital in order to prepare youth to become responsible citizens. Youth would continue to work towards the adoption of a youth rights charter at the Forum to be held in Portugal in 1998.

12. Member States should also endeavour to improve the situation of youth by taking into account the role and importance of non-governmental organizations working with youth, which made a major contribution to the informal education and development of many young people. They should, in future, be permitted to participate more fully in developing youth policies in close cooperation with national and local governments.

13. **Mr. Mernyi** (Austria) said that the second session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, which had been held in Vienna in 1996, bringing together more than 400 young people from 150 countries had been very successful. The report of the Forum had been issued as document A/52/80. With regard to youth-related issues, Austria attached particular importance to that of child labour, since it was currently estimated that some 300 million children were being forced to work. That problem, which was largely due to market forces, cutthroat competition and the widening gap between rich countries and poor countries, was growing. The child victims involved were ruthlessly exploited in the name of profit and often had no other choice. Real economic progress would be achieved with a well-trained and educated workforce. It was therefore important to focus on the education of children, and to guarantee their parents' employment.

14. In order to address the issue, the scale of the problem must be recognized, and research carried out. The primary responsibility for action against child labour lay with Governments; they should provide sufficient funds for education programmes, most importantly at primary level.

15. While nearly every country had laws against child labour, those laws were rarely enforced. Those who profited from the exploitation of children should be held responsible and brought to justice.

16. In order to halt the international trade of goods produced with child labour, economic sanctions could be imposed on countries involved, goods boycotted, preferential trade agreements used as incentives, codes of conduct adopted which could lead to the abolition of child labour and consumer awareness promoted through adequate labelling of goods.

17. The International Labour Organization was playing an essential role in the fight against child labour by helping Governments to take action in that respect, and should be supported by all relevant entities of the United Nations system and by the whole international community.

18. **Ms. Huitfeldt** (Norway), speaking in her capacity as youth representative, noted that the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, a biennial event, gave non-governmental youth organizations the opportunity to discuss with organizations of the United Nations system the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The next Youth Forum, which would be held in Braga, Portugal, in August 1998, would focus on the participation of youth in human development and their cooperation with special working groups on employment, health and education, as well as on youth policy, youth participation and youth rights, issues. Those issues were a good basis for promoting discussion on the implementation of the World Programme, and should be on the agenda of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, which would be held a few days after the Braga Forum. In order to make that Forum as effective as possible, young people from all over the world should be enabled to participate. Adequate financing was therefore necessary.

19. In 1990, the number of young people in the world aged between 15 and 24 had reached 1 billion. They should therefore be represented in the decision-making bodies of their respective countries, whether industrialized or developing, and should take part in politics at large in order to take control over their own lives.

20. Too many youth institutions were dominated by adults. It was important that young people's voices should be heard independently.

21. Young people all over the world were keenly interested in the protection of the environment. Environmental issues were an important part of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which viewed youth as a vital resource. Through education on environmental issues, young people wished to contribute actively to the implementation of Agenda 21.

22. The international community had safeguarded the rights of the child in the Convention on the Rights of the Child; it should also focus on the rights of youth, particularly those of

young women, and enable them to benefit from access to proper health care and education, have the opportunity to plan their families and be assured of respect for their personal integrity.

23. Like Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland, Norway allowed youth representatives to take part in the work of the General Assembly in order to increase their involvement in the international community and their contribution to the resolution of global issues.

24. **Ms. Lin Sha** (China) said that 80 per cent of youth, older and disabled persons lived in developing countries, where they were plagued by poverty and marginalized. The United Nations and the international community should focus on their particularly difficult situation and actively assist them in becoming integrated into society.

25. The Chinese Government had always attached great importance to youth, older and disabled persons. It had therefore greatly increased the number of activities in the field of youth education and had achieved impressive results (development of vocational training, improvement of the overall level of science and culture, reduction of illiteracy among young peasants, etc.).

26. Young people in China took an active part in decision-making at various levels in the work of the Government and of the People's Congress. They were a dynamic force in the economic field, as well as in industry, agriculture, trade, management and services, and were enthusiastic participants in environmental protection and literacy campaigns. As a result of their financial assistance to the "Hope Project", aimed at helping young school dropouts in rural areas, some 15.5 million children had resumed their studies. Young people had therefore become a force to be reckoned with in efforts to build the nation's future.

27. The ageing of populations was a universal problem, and China was no exception; the number of Chinese aged over 60 would reach 130 million by the year 2000. Aware of the social implications of that issue, the Chinese Government had in 1996 adopted measures to strengthen institutions for older people, and had promulgated a law on the protection of their rights and interests. It was currently creating a social security system (or improving existing systems) and consolidating its policy on ageing. It had made progress in implementing the "Aiding the Aged Project" which was designed to help bereaved and disabled older persons who could not support themselves.

28. Since there were 60 million people with disabilities in China, the Government was implementing a policy on the disabled in which the society at large and the disabled themselves participated. The central Government and local administrations were implementing a variety of measures for the disabled, including priority rehabilitation projects, the incorporation of education for disabled children into overall planning for universal compulsory education, the setting up of specially designed vocational training institutions and the provision of assistance to disabled persons who wished to start their own businesses. Furthermore, the Chinese Government ensured that the needs of the disabled were taken into account in its overall plan for poverty eradication and had provided funds to facilitate the rehabilitation of the disabled poor. In big cities, disabled-friendly facilities were gradually being provided which would enable the disabled to participate more in society.

29. China took an active part in United Nations activities concerning youth, the elderly and the disabled. It was actively implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond by cooperating with international organizations and participating in regional and world conferences on themes of direct or indirect interest to those segments of the population or by organizing such conferences itself. China was taking part in the activities of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and had initiated and participated in the financing of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. It had also participated actively in various seminars on ageing organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and in world conferences on gerontology held in Sydney, Singapore and Honolulu.

30. **Ms. Foo** (Singapore) said that the family unit, which from time immemorial had been the basic building block of human communities and societies, was the single most important means of perpetuating values and providing stability in any society. The break-up of the family observed in many parts of the world in recent years had contributed to a weakening of the social fabric, unbridled individualism, a poorer work ethic and increased crime.

31. The contemporary debate on the integrity of the family unit had brought out all manner of divergent views, but had failed to come up with a universally acceptable definition of the family. Singapore favoured a pragmatic approach, since it believed that it was more important to increase public awareness of the issue and encourage public discussion thereof.

32. Surveys conducted by the Singapore Housing and Development Board, the National Trade Union Congress and local newspapers showed that a large majority of the population valued family ties and held the family in high regard. Many debates had been held on the issue, especially

as part of the commemoration of the International Year of the Family; when love, mutual respect, filial responsibility, commitment and communication had been designated by a large majority as core family values. Following the commemoration of the Year, a Family Values Promotion Fund of 1 million Singapore dollars had been set up to promote such values. It financed the implementation of projects of individuals or organizations, including publications, educational cassettes and videos, symposia, workshops and dance and theatrical performances.

33. Her Government firmly believed that the State's social budget should be used not so much to assist individuals under all circumstances as to help accumulate assets and acquire knowledge and professional qualifications in order to become self-reliant. That was why it had taken measures to preserve the family unit and extended family structure and to strengthen the community — the natural environment for mutual assistance and solidarity. Such measures included tax rebates for households with one to four children and those supporting aged parents and/or disabled siblings; incentives for families in which two or three generations lived together; the establishment of child-care centres; and child-care subsidies for working mothers. In addition, Singapore was implementing a policy on family life education which provided premarital counselling, counselling for families in danger of breaking up and teaching of parenting skills.

34. While the family could foster economic and social development by giving individuals a sense of balance and fulfilment, it was also within the family that individuals could best enjoy economic and social development. That was why the momentum generated by the International Year of the Family should be maintained by ensuring effective and sustained follow-up.

35. **Mr. Chang Beom Cho** (Republic of Korea) took note with appreciation of the Secretary-General's reports dealing with various aspects of social development (A/52/57, A/52/60, A/52/328 and A/52/351). His delegation wished to pay a tribute to the Special Rapporteur on Disability and welcomed the decision of the Economic and Social Council to renew his mandate for an additional period of three years.

36. He stressed the importance of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which had inspired many Governments to make the disabled a priority and had heightened public awareness of disability issues. However, as the Special Rapporteur had emphasized in his report (A/52/56), there were still many regions where the Standard Rules had not yet led to the complete social integration and full participation of disabled persons.

37. The Republic of Korea, which had more than 1 million disabled persons (2 per cent of the population), attached high priority to that issue and had established in 1996 a Disability Welfare Policy Committee, headed by the Prime Minister, which had launched a five-year plan to try to resolve the problems faced by the disabled in the areas of welfare, employment and education. The Government had also organized public awareness-raising campaigns and events for the annual observance of Disabled Persons Day.

38. By increasing job opportunities for the disabled, the Disabled Persons Employment Act encouraged such persons to be self-supporting. As far as the mass media were concerned, there were now special programmes for the disabled.

39. Since becoming the recipient in 1996 of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Disability Award in recognition of its activities on behalf of the disabled, the Government of the Republic of Korea had implemented new programmes, including the five-year plan for the promotion of special education, and had decided to increase the budget for disability welfare by 40 per cent. Stressing the importance of regional cooperation in that field, he welcomed the decision of ESCAP member States to proclaim 1993-2002 as the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, and noted that his Government had hosted the International Conference on Disability and the Mid-Decade ESCAP Meeting for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) in Seoul in September 1997. The latter meeting, organized by ESCAP, had noted the progress made and reaffirmed the commitment of participants to the full implementation of the agenda for action for the Asian and Pacific Decade, including the formulation of national plans of action, conducting disability censuses and implementing specific disability-prevention programmes.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.